

# Sleepy

## by Arthur Jaz

Once all the employees were seated, Mr. Davis approached the podium. He was a thin man of average height, approximately forty years of age, wearing a dull gray suit and black loafers. He looked out at the audience of three hundred, all of them waiting for him to speak.

Mr. Davis began the presentation on the current financial state of the company, which he had prepared meticulously over the course of the past several days. He saw a couple of stifled yawns, a few people muttering to each other behind their hands. Perhaps it had been a bad idea to hold this particular meeting so early in the day. But it had not been Mr. Davis's decision.

It was not his forte to leave things to chance, so he had painstakingly memorized every word of the speech. He had been up until four in the morning reciting it to his teddy bear. Penhallegon was a far more appreciative audience than the one he was now addressing.

As he gestured to his secretary, Rachel, to begin the powerpoint, his eyes suddenly closed. He could not open them. For a moment he struggled, even attempting to pry them open with his fingers, but then he discovered he no longer wanted to keep them open. He fell asleep, standing at the podium.

The staff members stared at him. They turned to stare at one another.

Rachel stood, straightening her skirt. She rubbed her nose nervously, then stepped up onto the stage.

She shook Mr. Davis, first gently, then with roughness. She whispered his name. Finally she smacked him in the back of the head. Even this failed to awaken him.

Four people near the back of the room started to leave after ten minutes of this.

A very tall, very heavysset black man blocked their path. He crossed his arms.

The four people sat back down.

Mr. Davis snored. He dreamed of a tropical island and three stunningly beautiful women: blonde, brunette, redhead.

Three hundred employees fidgeted in their seats. The black man did not move from his post. Rachel had never seen him before. She wasn't even sure he actually worked for the company.

Hours ticked by. Nobody got up to go to the bathroom; not a single person's stomach growled.

Very few words were spoken. The room held a creepy silence.

Morning led to afternoon; afternoon gave way to night. There was no clock in the room. Rachel's watch had stopped the minute Mr. Davis fell asleep.

One by one, the staff nodded off, still sitting up in their chairs as if listening intently. They slept for several hours, until the sun rose again. Only Rachel remained awake.

Mr. Davis's chin was soaked in drool, which Rachel wiped off every hour or so.

The three hundred employees woke up, rested, only a few of them in any way irritable. They sat. They stared at Mr. Davis.

Another day passed, in the same fashion as before. Rachel stayed awake while everyone else slept. The black man at the door stood motionless, unconscious only when everyone else was unconscious.

Then came the weekend, then another week. The parking lots outside filled up in the mornings and emptied again nine or ten hours later. Nobody came in to check and see why the meeting was still going on.

The women in Mr. Davis's dream eventually grew tired of him and swam away from the island. When this happened, he woke up briefly. It was nighttime, three months to the day after the meeting had started. He saw that his employees were all sleeping except for Rachel. He winked at her. She scratched her head, then winked back in confusion.

He showed the powerpoint presentation, offering up his comments where appropriate. Occasionally he massaged his aching legs and flexed his joints.

Three slides from the end of the powerpoint he fell asleep again. About an hour after that the audience woke up, stretching, their hair and beards noticeably longer than they had been.

Summer passed, then autumn. The employees missed Christmas. On New Year's Eve the local area received an unprecedented forty inches of snow, and nobody inside

the meeting room even noticed. Time continued to pass. Mr. Davis continued to sleep. The staff continued to wait.

Seventy-five years after the meeting began, Rachel took a compact mirror out of her purse. There were now so many wrinkles carved into her time-worn face that she could barely make out any distinctive facial features. She wept silently into her wizened hands.

Incredibly, everyone was still alive, though extremely old. The black man had been standing in front of the door for so long that he had fused to it; it was impossible to tell where he stopped and the door began. Sometimes he mumbled to himself.

Ten minutes after two on a Saturday morning, seventy-six years after the start of the meeting, Mr. Davis opened his eyes. He squinted at the audience. His hands shook as he cleared his throat. He grasped the microphone and said, "I think we've got time for one more question."